

Message Text

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51

ACTION NEA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 AID-20 USIA-15 EB-11 COME-00 EUR-25

EA-11 CU-04 SPM-01 IGA-02 TRSE-00 XMB-07 CIAE-00

INR-10 NSAE-00 RSC-01 PA-04 PRS-01 HEW-08 OMB-01

DRC-01 /135 W

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R 250855Z APR 74

FM AMEMBASSY KABUL

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7656

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PASS USAID, USIS AND COMMERCE

E.O. 11652: NA

TAGS: PFOR, EGEN, EAID

SUBJ: PLANS FOR TV IN AFGHANISTAN

1. WE HAVE BEEN APPROACHED BY THE MINISTRY OF INFORMATION AND CULTURE WITH A REQUEST THAT THE U.S. GOVERNMENT ASSIST IN ESTABLISHING A TV SYSTEM IN AFGHANISTAN. WE HAVE LISTENED TO THE PRESENTATIONS CAREFULLY BUT DID NOT MAKE ANY COMMITMENTS. THE MINISTRY IS PLANNING TO DEVELOP THIS NEW MEDIA CAPABILITY FOR REACHING LARGE NUMBERS OF AFGHANS.

2. BACKGROUND: THE GOA HAS LONG BEEN TOYING WITH IDEA OF

INSTALLING TELEVISION BROADCASTING CAPABILITY IN KABUL. OVER THE YEARS THE GOVERNMENT HAS DISCUSSED PLANS AND PROBLEMS CONNECTED WITH SUCH A PROJECT WITH THE FRENCH AND JAPANESE, AND MORE RECENTLY, WITH THE PUBLIC AFFAIRS AND ECONOMIC OFFICERS OF THE EMBASSY. AFTER CONSIDERABLE THOUGHT AND EXTENSIVE DEBATE WITHIN THE MINISTRY OF INFORMATION AND CULTURE AS WELL AS WITHIN THE CABINET, THE GOA DECIDED TO GIVE HIGH PRIORITY TO THE INSTALLATION OF TELEVISION.

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3. TELLING ARGUMENTS TO AFGHANS FOR INSTALLATION APPARENTLY

WERE TWO: A) TELEVISION CAN BE USED AS A NATION-BUILDING VEHICLE AND, PERHAPS MORE IMPORTANT; B) TELEVISION CAN BE USED AS AN EDUCATIONAL MEDIA CLOSELY ASSOCIATED WITH DEVELOPMENT. AFGHANS HAVE ARGUED THAT WITH TELEVISION LARGE NUMBERS OF PEOPLE CAN BE REACHED MORE EFFECTIVELY THAN IS POSSIBLE WITH RADIO, NOT TO SPEAK OF PRINT MEDIA IN THIS LARGELY ILLITERATE COUNTRY.

4. MASTER PLAN: AFGHANISTAN HAS RECEIVED MASTER PLAN DEVELOPED BY JAPANESE TELEVISION TECHNICAL TEAM WHICH VISITED AFGHANISTAN TO MAKE TECHNICAL FEASIBILITY STUDY. PLAN CALLS FOR INSTALLATION OF TV IN STAGES. FIRST STAGE WOULD CALL FOR INSTALLATION OF CAPABILITY COVERING KABUL, PARWAN, KAPISA, LOGAR AND NANGARHAR PROVINCES. PHYSICAL PLANT WOULD BE INTEGRATED WITH RADIO AFGHANISTAN IN KABUL. TRANSMISSION WOULD BE LIMITED TO BLACK AND WHITE WITH A 50 KILOWATT TRANSMITTER BEAMING A SIGNAL FROM A 300 METER HIGH ANTENNA TO BE BUILT IN CENTER OF KABUL ON TOP ASMOI MOUNTAIN. THE GOA APPARENTLY IS MOST INTERESTED IN THE US-FCC (PAL)H2STEM BECAUSE IT IS NOT COMPATIBLE WITH THE TV SYSTEM USED NORTH OF THE BORDER. THE SECOND STAGE IS TO DEVELOP COUNTRY-WIDE SYSTEM WHICH WOULD COME SOMEWHAT LATER WITH BROADCASTS BEING BEAMED FROM MAZAR-I-SHARIF. MATERIAL WOULD BE TRANSMITTED TO MAZAR VIA EITHER MICRO-WAVE OR TV RELAY TOWERS.

5. STAGE ONE OF PLAN IS BROKEN DOWN IN TWO PHASES. PHASE ONE WOULD BE RESTRICTED TO EXPERIMENTAL CLOSED CIRCUIT TV. EMPHASIS WOULD BE ON TRAINING OF TECHNICIANS, PROGRAMMERS AND DEVELOPMENT OF PROGRAMMING THAT COULD BE USED AT LATER STAGES. SOURCES OF/AND ARRANGEMENTS FOR OBTAINING TRANSMISSION OF FOREIGN PROGRAMS WOULD ALSO BE DEVELOPED DURING THIS PHASE. SECOND PHASE OF STAGE ONE WOULD CONTINUE THE BROADCASTING DEVELOPED IN STAGE ONE BY THE NEWLY QUALIFIED TECHNICIANS AND WOULD BE EXPANDED TO APPROXIMATELY 60,000 RECEIVERS IN FIVE PROVINCES.

6. PROJECTED PRIORITY USE FOR TV: WHEN ASKED, DEPUTY MINISTER OF INFORMATION AND CULTURE OUTLINED THE PRIORITY USE FOR TV AS "TO EDUCATE, GUIDE, INFORM AND ENTERTAIN" IN THAT ORDER. EDUCATIONAL MATERIAL WILL BE DEVELOPED FOR SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN. AS AFGHANS SEE IT, TV MUST PROVIDE SUPPLEMENTAL, STRENGTHENING MATERIAL FOR CURRIC- LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ULUM SUBJECTS AS WELL AS MATERIALS FOR SUBJECTS NOT COVERED IN REGULAR PROGRAMS. THE LACK OF ADEQUATE TEXTS, SUPPORTING MATERIAL AND TRAINED PERSONNEL IS WELL-RECOGNIZED AND THE AFGHANS APPARENTLY SEE TV AS ONE METHOD TO HELP FILL THIS GAP IN THE EDUCATIONAL STRUCTURE. AS NOW CONCEIVED INITIAL TV EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING WOULD BE TIMED TO BEGIN WITH THE END OF THE SCHOOL-DAY. TV SETS WOULD BE PLACED IN SCHOOL BUILDINGS WHERE GROUP VIEWING WOULD BE

POSSIBLE BY THE STUDENTS.

7. "GUIDANCE" IS EQUATED WITH CERTAIN FUNCTIONAL EDUCATION ELEMENTS INTENDED TO DEAL WITH SOCIAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL PROBLEMS. SPECIFICALLY, THE DEPUTY MINISTER OF INFORMATION AND CULTURE LISTED IN ORDER OF PRIORITY, FAMILY PLANNING, SANITATION AND HYGIENE, HOMEMAKING, MARRIAGE AND FAMILY PROBLEMS, AND AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SUBJECTS SUCH AS USE OF FERTILIZER, INSECTICIDES, CROP ROTATION AND INTRODUCTION OF HIGHER VALUE MARKET CROPS.

8. INFORMATIONAL PROGRAMS WOULD COVER NEWS, SCIENCE, AND TECHNOLOGY.

9. WHEN ASKED HOW TV COULD POSSIBLY REACH THE "NEEDIEST MAJORITY" IN A COUNTRY WHERE 85 TO 90 PERCENT LIVE ON SUBSISTENCE AGRICULTURE, THE DEPUTY MINISTER MAINTAINED THAT THE GOVERNMENT PLANS TO SUBSIDIZE COMMUNAL SETS WHICH WOULD BE PLACED IN SMALL VILLAGE HALLS FOR VIEWING BY ALL. NATURALLY, HE SAID, THE BETTER-OFF WOULD PURCHASE THEIR OWN SETS. THE GOVERNMENT WILL IMPORT INEXPENSIVE BLACK AND WHITE RECEIVERS WHICH WOULD BE EXEMPTED FROM EXCISE, CUSTOMS AND OTHER TAXES TO KEEP THE PRICE DOWN AS LOW AS POSSIBLE.

10. DEPUTY MINISTER CLAIMS JAPANESE SURVEY TEAM ESTIMATED COST OF ESTABLISHING BASIC SYSTEM FOR REGIONS DESCRIBED ABOVE, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF NANGARHAR PROVINCE, WOULD COST APPROXIMATELY 450,000 DOLLARS. THESE SUMS COVER PHYSICAL PLAN HARDWARE AND TRANSMITTERS. ANOTHER

\$400,000 IS ESTIMATED FOR RESERVE FUND TO COVER FINANCING OF SOFTWARE, TRAINING, PROGRAM PURCHASES AND MISCELLANEOUS UNFORSEEN COSTS. WE HAVE NOT MADE ANY EFFORT TO VERIFY VALIDITY OF THESE ESTIMATES.

11. WE HAVE DISCUSSED COMMERCIAL INTEREST EXPRESSED BY AMERICAN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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FIRMS SUCH AS RCA, OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT CORP AND TCOM CORP WITH MINISTRY AS WELL AS POSSIBLE SOURCES OF PRIVATE FINANCING. HOWEVER, DEPUTY MINISTER SAID FINANCING FOR THIS PROJECT WOULD HAVE TO BE ON A GOVERNMENT TO GOVERNMENT BASIS SINCE PRIVATE FINANCING WOULD, AT THIS TIME, BE POLITICALLY UNACCEPTABLE TO THE GOA. ONCE FINANCING IS ARRANGED, WE ARE ASSURED, PRIVATE FIRMS COULD BE BROUGHT IN TO HANDLE ALL PHASES OF PLANNING, CONSTRUCTION AND TRAINING.

12. DURING SEVERAL DISCUSSIONS, MINISTRY OF INFORMATION AND CULTURE MADE THE POINT REPEATEDLY THAT AMERICAN ASSISTANCE IN THIS PROJECT WOULD BE EXTREMELY WELCOME, IN FACT PREFERRED. OTHER COUNTRIES MENTIONED AS POSSIBLE DONORS WERE JAPAN, FRANCE AND SOVIET UNION -- IN THAT ORDER OF PREFERENCE. AFGHANS TALK OF JAPAN AS THE MOST LIKELY SUPPORTER OF THIS PROJECT. OUR INFORMATION LEADS US TO BELIEVE THAT WHILE JAPANESE FIRMS ARE INTERESTED IN THE

COMMERCIAL ASPECTS OF THIS PROJECT, LITTLE LOAN MONEY WILL BE AVAILABLE FROM JAPAN. AS WE UNDERSTAND IT, A TELEVISION NET IS FAR DOWN ON THE JAPANESE ASSISTANCE PRIORITIES FOR AFGHANISTAN. A SIMILAR SITUATION APPEARS TO EXIST WITH THE WORLD BANK. WE DO NOT HAVE SUFFICIENT INFORMATION ON FRENCH OR SOVIET VIEWS ON TV NET FOR AFGHANISTAN TO MAKE VALID ASSESSMENT ON PROBABILITY OF FUNDING FROM EITHER OF THESE GOVERNMENTS. OUR GUESS, HOWEVER, IS THAT SINCE FRANCE DID OFFER SUPPORT FOR A TV SYSTEM IN PAST, IT REASONABLY COULD BE EXPECTED TO DO SO AGAIN. SOVIET INTEREST IN ESTABLISHING A COMPATIBLE TV SYSTEM HERE IS OBVIOUS AND THEIR SUPPORT OF SUCH A PROJECT WOULD BE IN LINE WITH THEIR OTHER ACTIVITIES IN THIS FIELD.

13. COMMENT: WITH LIMITED FUNDS AND ABSENCE OF ELECTRICITY IN MOST RURAL AREAS, IT IS NOT CLEAR THAT A TV SYSTEM REACHING A COUNTRY-WIDE MASS AUDIENCE IS FEASIBLE. ANOTHER PROBLEM WE SHOULD NOTE IS THE POOR PA
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: FOREIGN INVESTMENT, TELEVISION SYSTEMS, TELEVISION EQUIPMENT
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 25 APR 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
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Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
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Office: ACTION NEA
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Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags: ANOMALY
Review Date: 13 AUG 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <13-Aug-2002 by worrelsw>; APPROVED <13 FEB 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PLANS FOR TV IN AFGHANISTAN
TAGS: PFOR, EGEN, EAID
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005